



351293

EPA may halt leak; disposal uncertain

CHICAGO TRIBUNE 10/12/83

By Ray Gibson

REGIONAL OFFICIALS of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency agreed Tuesday to try to halt the leaking of a toxic chemical from 120 trailers laden with cyanide-laced film chips that have been illegally stored at six Cook County sites. Tuesday's decision is contingent upon approval of federal funds to finance the "stabilization" operation, and it stops short of a pledge to fund the disposal of 14.5 million pounds of film chips now at the six sites and at two warehouses in Dixon.

Approval of funds needed to clean up the sites "would be a future action that would have to be considered," said Robert Hartian, spokesman for the Chicago regional office of the agency.

When a \$200,000 clean-up plan failed after only 1.5 million pounds of chips were disposed of, officials of the Illinois EPA requested that the federal agency consider using money from its "Superfund" to clean up the Cook County and Dixon sites. The Superfund is a \$1.6 billion national program to clean up hazardous wastes.

THE CHIPS ARE a byproduct of a process used by an Elk Grove Village firm to recover silver from film. Illinois Atty. Gen. Neil Hartigan sued the firm, Film Recovery Systems Inc., in May for illegally storing 16 million pounds of the chips in the rented trailers and at the Dixon warehouses.

Hartian said it should be known Wednesday whether Washington EPA officials will permit Superfund money to be used to stop the cyanide leaking from the trailers, which are located in Chicago, Summit,

Hodgkins, Chicago Ridge, McCook and Rosemont.

"We see it as an environmental risk," said Hartian, noting that officials fear the leaking cyanide is running off the sites into local streams and endangering anyone who might come in contact with it.

In addition, Hartian said the agency fears that some of the trailers could collapse, creating an even greater hazard.

IF FUNDING is approved, private contractors would be hired to figure out how to contain the cyanide wastes and to determine the structural integrity of the trailers, Hartian said. Hartian said he could not release the preliminary cost figure because it could affect price negotiations with private contractors.

He said that among the possible solutions for containing the leaking cyanide were building earthen dams and sealing the trailers in plastic.

Work could begin at the sites within several days, Hartian said. But a long-term solution may be months away, he added, and the trailers may have to be stored at the sites until spring.